PALESTINE
AND THE
JEWS.

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PALESTINE AND THE JEWS.

If the watchword of the war is justice to the nationalities, it must be clear to every understanding mind that the cause of the most ancient of nationalities, the Jews, cannot be ignored in the resettlement of the world. But the Jewish national problem, because it is that of the oldest of nations, is in some respects more complex than the rest. For the Jews there are in reality two problems only incidentally connected with one another: there is the problem of just treatment in the lands in which they dwell, and there is the problem of their national revival. The first is the problem of the Jews as individuals, and must find its solution with the gradual conquest of the world by more liberal ideas. The second is the problem of Jewish nationalism, of Judaism the specifically Jewish contribution to civilisation. It is inseparable from Palestine.

The note of the Jewish liturgy is the ceaseless iteration of the appeal by the Jew for the return of his people to the land of their fathers. The restoration for which the Jew hoped and prayed through ages of exile and persecution was not an allegorical but a literal return. The object of the restoration was not simply the revival in its ancient fullness of the Jewish cult, but the revival of the Jewish

nation, which in Jewish thought is the living embodiment of the Jewish religion. This faith in the future redemption, this unbroken association with the land of Israel, was one of the factors in the preservation of Israel. It left a deep mark on the Jewish mind, and it made Palestine in the creative traditions of the nation an earthly paradise round which all the nation's wealth of legend, fancy, beautiful imagery and optimism gathered. Palestine was for the Jew an eternal reality, while the Ghetto was only a fleeting phantom. It kept his soul alive in the night of persecution.

Such was Palestine to all Jews until the latter half of the eighteenth century. Since then two different tendencies have been at work: a tendency to eliminate the national element from Judaism and to reduce it to a mere faith, and a tendency to reduce the religious element and conceive Judaism as simply a nation. Both represent aberrations, and the main stream of Jewish thought and feeling is, as it always has been, to hold the Jews to be a specific people with, in Judaism, an outlook of its own upon all life—religious, philosophic, æsthetic. The decisive influence in maintaining the true course for Judaism has been Russian Jewry.

To-day, though the essence of Jewish nationalism remains much what it has always been, the form has changed. One small change to be noted is that the passive attitude has disappeared. The Jew thinks that in the regeneration of the Jewish people the Jews

themselves must act, not simply await. More important, he has a preciser notion of what reunion with Palestine means to him as an individual and to the Jewish people. He sees in it spiritual freedom for himself and spiritual freedom for his people, each of which is dependent upon the other, and neither of which exists outside Palestine.

The Jew outside Palestine, be it in England, France, or Germany, or the United States, is the battlefield of a moral and spiritual conflict. He must absorb in its entirety the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere of the country in which he lives—an atmosphere created of ideas which are often not Jewish and may be anti-Jewish—or he must shut himself up in a kind of Ghetto. In either case his spiritual being is mutilated. The assimilant is tempted to seek satisfaction or an anodyne in an English, German, or French patriotism more violent or more thoroughgoing than contents his fellow-citizen of purest English, German, or French descent. The Jewish nationalist may endeavour to prevent himself being mastered by an alien culture, but he cannot escape its influence, still less can he create the specifically Jewish civilisation within the prison of a moral Ghetto. The result is a terrible distortion and an enormous waste of moral force. The Jew finds himself building up the civilisation of nations who denounce him for the very prodigality of his labours, which are lost to his own people. "They have made me the keeper of their vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept." That is the tragedy of Judaism,

all the more bitter because it falls upon a people conscious that theirs is a personality and a quality distinct from that of any other people, and theirs an outlook on life as individual and as necessary to the evolution of civilisation as that of the English, French, or Germans.

The complete Jew, faithful to the Jewish genius, can be produced only in the Jewish land, just as the complete Englishman, faithful to the English genius, can be produced only in England. The instrument of the Jewish genius must be the Jewish language, just as English is the instrument of the English genius.

The Jewish land is Palestine; the Jewish language is Hebrew. Palestine is the Jewish land, because whatever national life the Jewish people have lived has been inseparably associated with Palestine. When they constituted a State its seat was Palestine. Their literature has sprung from the soil of Palestine. Their law, their institutions, their cult have been moulded in the image of Palestine. Two thousand years of exile have produced no divorce, for tradition and hope, the impress of the past, and the promise of the future, have kept Palestine before the eyes of every true Jew as the goal of the age-long Jewish pilgrimage through the wilderness. Hebrew is the one language in which the Jewish spirit has found full expression, and the only language which has guaranteed to any product of the Jewish genius enduring life and persistent influence among the Jewish people. The aim of Jewish

nationalism, of Zionism, is therefore to create in Palestine a Jewish society based upon Hebrew, which shall be a spiritual centre for the scattered hosts of Jewry. Those Jews who settle in Palestine and share in the upbuilding and in the life of this new society will have the spiritual conflict of the Jew in exile solved. It will be possible for them to be Jews in the same sense as the Englishman is an Englishman or the Frenchman a Frenchman. For the Jews outside Palestine Palestine will create a norm whose authority cannot be questioned of the true tendency of Jewish development in religion, in ethics, in art, and in science.

The world, or at least so much as believes in nationality, has no doubt that it is the richer for the liberation of any national spirit from bondage. The Jewish national spirit may, without arrogance, claim the benefit of this general recognition. It has made memorable contributions to civilisation, and the vigour of its activity even in servitude is evidence that it has not lost its virtue, and that in freedom it will renew its youth. This is not the place to discuss the distinctive character of Judaism, but there is plainly one mission which a Jewish Palestine is alone competent to fulfil—the reconciliation of East and West by the exposition of the Orient to the Occident and of the Occident to the Orient. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that that will be the supreme problem of the new world created by the war.

Jewish Palestine and Hebrew as a living tongue are no mere visions. They are a fabric

the foundations and the substructure of which already exist. Since the pogroms of the 'eighties in Russia a stream of Jewish emigrants has moved to Palestine, where there were before the outbreak of war 100,000 Jews in a total population of some 700,000. Most of these Jews have gone to the towns, but 10,000 are settled in some forty agricultural colonies scattered all over Palestine. They came to a land where there were no roads, where the Government's one interest was to collect taxes, where an age-long tradition banned all progress, where a populace with a low standard of living and a taste for anarchy made the building up of a new society infinitely hard. These Jewish pioneers, students and townsmen, severed from the land for 2,000 years, overcame every difficulty, and their colonies are the only vital and progressive thing in the land of Palestine. In the towns they are in process of achieving a miracle not less significant. At Tel Aviv, a suburb of Jaffa, they have created out of the sand dunes a garden city which when war came they were extending, and to which they were about to add companions at Jerusalem and Haifa. In all the colonies the language of every-day speech is Hebrew; it is the mother-tongue of the younger generation even in the towns. It is the tongue which has conquered the Jewish schools and is the instrument of a flourishing press. The Hebrew schools in Palestine include, along with a network of elementary schools, a number of secondary schools comparable with the best of their kind in Europe.

The foundations have been laid of a technical college at Haifa, and on the eve of the war the plans had ripened for the beginning of a Hebrew University at Jerusalem, which should in time be for the new Jewry what the universities of Europe have been to the nations of Europe.

This has been the fruit of the labour of many individuals and one great organisation. Foremost among the individuals is Baron Edmond de Rothschild, whose devotion to the Jewish cause in Palestine is the highest glory of his house. The organisation is that of the Zionists. Starting as societies of "Lovers of Zion," those engaged in the regeneration of Palestine acquired under the leadership of Dr. Herzl an infinitely more effective organisation, larger financial resources, and a wider appeal. The Zionist movement numbers in all the communities of the world a quarter-million members. It has in the Jewish Colonial Trust, the Anglo-Palestine Bank, the Anglo-Levantine Company three financial instruments of its purpose. It has in the Jewish National Fund an instrument which raises £30,000 a year for the purchase of land in Palestine to be held inalienably for the Jewish people. It has in the Palestine Land Development Company and other enterprises agencies for the planting of Jewish colonies and the building of Jewish towns. It has the germ of a Jewish Civil Service, and it has made a great variety of social and economic experiments in Palestine.

This has been, for the most part, the work

of men in Jewry poor in material resources and unknown outside the bounds of Zionism, and it has been carried on in face of great obstacles. Under an enlightened and sympathetic rule, and with indefinitely larger resources, the regeneration of the Jewish people and the Jewish land would proceed at a far greater pace. Within a generation Palestine might well give to the world a Jewish nation which had renewed its youth and asserted itself once more among the banner-bearers of civilisation. S.

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